



# ELSAH HISTORY

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Historic Elsay Foundation, P.O. Box 117, Elsay, IL 62028

## *Elsah Village in Bloom*





### ***The President's Message***

Hello friends of Historic Elsie Foundation. If you know anything at all about us you know we are an all-volunteer organization. As president, I get to compose this message. As a volunteer I get to edit (that means write) this issue of *Elsah History*. The cover photo, the Tim and Deborah Smith home on Selma, and the photo's title reflect my state of mind—very upbeat, very high on “all things Elsie,” very high on what HEF has done over the past year, is doing now, and intends to do.

We are in the midst of a Capital Campaign and doing quite well. The enclosed materials are the last phase of the campaign, and we hope all our friends will pay attention to what we need to move forward in a positive manner, and how you, our friends, can help. Key to long-term stewardship is a commitment to our preservation responsibilities and a determination to find a way to pay for what needs to be done, today, and tomorrow, especially tomorrow. Our campaign has focused on upgrading our two historic properties—Farley's Music Hall and the Historic Ice House. We've done what needed to be done, for the time being. With historic properties, it's always for the time being. The last push of our Capital Campaign is to increase our endowment holdings, the keystone, in my view, to our financial well-being and the best road to success in keeping our promises as stewards.

The Hosmer-Williams Lecture Series, underwritten principally by Liberty Bank of Godfrey, Illinois, is now the premier free lecture series in the area. Attendance is improving steadily as we find better ways of getting out the word. This year's theme is Lincoln and the end of the American Civil War. Two of our five programs will have been presented as you read this, but you can attend a great program on June 7, 2015 at 2 PM in Farley's, *The Little Drummer Boy of Shiloh*, presented in collaboration with the Chautauqua Historical Society. In September we will be honored to have as our guest the Music Director and Conductor of the Illinois Symphony, Alastair Willis, a Principia alumnus, who will talk about music and the Civil War, September 29, 2015 at 7:30 PM in Farley's Music Hall. The last of the 2015 lectures will be related to local peach and apple production and we are working on a date and a way to connect that to Lincoln. Plan to join us for these wonderful talks..

This issue of *Elsah History* is about HEF and leadership of the Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin Project. The picture to the right is me, in costume, in procession with the Lincoln funeral cortege. We want to share also information about other happenings in Elsie, new beginnings for old spaces, the ongoing success of the Contra Dance program at Farley's, an introduction to a new look for our website, including a method of renewing (or joining again or for the first time) your membership on line, and an effort to save the Eliestoun property on the Principia campus.

Thanks, as always, for your support—**Tim Tomlinson**




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### ***Elsah in Bloom--The Changing Landscape***

The next time you are walking along LaSalle Street take the time to visit a very new but very old place, the ***Elsah General Store***, 22 LaSalle Street. Walk through the front door and you will think you have been transported back several decades to the time when J. K. Keller & Son served the village and its surrounding communities. Today's store captures the feeling of a simpler time while offering groceries, old time candies, unique gifts and cards, and a weekly "best of St. Louis" delivery. The store is open Wednesday-Saturday, 10 AM to 7 PM, Sunday from 12 PM to 5 PM, and closed Monday and Tuesday. Owners Blair and Dory Smith have a long-standing Principia and Village connection. Blair is Secretary of Historic Elsah Foundation and has a leadership role in the annual *Home for the Holidays* event.



The ***Maple Leaf Cottage Inn*** is under new ownership, and changes and improvements are planned by Debbie and Tim Smith, long-time owners of other properties in the Village. A B&B since 1949, it offers hot home-made breakfast, and an all around friendly family-like atmosphere. Free bikes are available for guests and a lawn fire pit provides an evening opportunity for socializing and relaxation. The Inn is open 365 days a year—call 618-374-1684, or like the Inn on Facebook.

The ***Contra Dances*** continue to be popular with local residents and with people from the Riverbend area and some St. Louis communities. The dances, sponsored by Mark and Susan Young, take place on the second Saturday evening of each month, except July and August. A dance on June 13, 2015 is a special. It's a fundraiser for the Sierra Club. Check the schedule at [www.elsahevents.com](http://www.elsahevents.com)

Historic Elsah Foundation is revising our website. The site will be organized so membership can be renewed easily and new members can be enrolled through an online process that includes paying fees through the PayPal/credit card system. Gifts to our Capital Campaign and special projects can be made in the same way. Folks who want to rent Farley's Music Hall will be able to handle most of the process by following easy steps provided online. Look for updates and improvements at [www.historicelsah.org](http://www.historicelsah.org)

There is a new preservation project in the area. The ***Friends of Eliestoun*** have been very busy organizing and raising funds to maintain and preserve the integrity of this historic building, the 19<sup>th</sup> century country estate of St. Louis businessman Henry S. Turner, Jr. and his wife, Ada Ames Turner, granddaughter of James Semple, founder of Elsah. Eliestoun holds a special place in regional architectural history as one of the few remaining examples of shingle-style architecture in the entire St. Louis area. The *Friends* have raised over \$100,000 in cash "to safeguard historic Eliestoun, its buildings and grounds, for future generations of Principia students, for the Village of Elsah, and the community at large." Principia is supportive of the efforts. Historic Elsah Foundation directors have met with college officials to show support. This promises to be a many-year adventure. Depending on the scope of the project, restoration of the building may cost from \$500,000 to \$2 million. If you are interested in receiving more information or in making a donation, please go to [facebook.com/historiceliestoun](https://facebook.com/historiceliestoun) or visit the website [www.friendsofeliestoun.org](http://www.friendsofeliestoun.org)



## The Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin

By Tim Tomlinson

Abraham Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth at Ford's Theater in Washington City on April 14, 1865 at around 10:13 in the evening. It was Good Friday. The President was carried across the street to the Peterson House and placed in a bedroom on the second floor. Through the night Lincoln was ministered to by a small group of men—physicians, army officers, and cabinet members. His wife was brought to the boarding house from the theater and stayed through the night. Mary Todd Lincoln never entered the room in which her husband lay dying. Abraham Lincoln died at 7:22 on Saturday morning.

Abraham Lincoln's first coffin was a plain wood box built hastily by the Army Quartermaster Corps to transport the body from the Peterson House to the White House. Around 9 AM a small contingent of soldiers loaded the coffin on a wagon and solemnly marched the six blocks to the White House. The news of Lincoln's shooting had been sent to all parts of the country by telegraph, but in Washington on that morning only a few onlookers witnessed the slow parade of the dead President. By Sunday afternoon an ornate coffin, perhaps the most ornate coffin ever built for an American president, was delivered to the White House. Lincoln's body was placed in the coffin, for a state funeral, first in the East Room of the White House and then in the Capitol Rotunda.

On April 21, 1865 the Lincoln coffin was loaded on the Presidential Train Car and began the thirteen day, almost 1,700 mile journey to Springfield, Illinois where Lincoln would be laid to rest. On May 2-3, 2015, one hundred fifty years later, the last journey of Abraham Lincoln, 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States, was reenacted in Springfield, Illinois. The Great Rivers History Coalition, a partnership of Historic Elsay Foundation, the Chautauqua Historical Society, and the Grafton Historical Society, created a museum quality, well authenticated model of the Lincoln coffin for the Reenactment ceremonies in Springfield, Illinois, a coffin fit for a slain President.

The Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin frame was built by Grafton woodworker Richard Mosby. It is a double shell coffin with a walnut exterior shell and poplar interior. It is covered with black wool broadcloth, decorated with silver plate medallions with handles, large and small stars, more than 1,000 silver tacks or buttons, and adorned with silver bullion fringe and tassels. The tassels are arranged to form a shamrock pattern. The tassels hang down from the coffin lids



so that they line up perfectly with the stars that are placed in the shamrock center.

Lincoln cartoon from *Harper's Illustrated Weekly*, November 1864, from Google Images.



The Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin was one of the centerpieces of the recent ceremonies in Springfield. A replica of the Presidential train car, *The United States*, was in place outside the Amtrak station. Ceremonies began with the removal of our flag-draped coffin from the train site. The coffin was carried by Civil War reenactors representing the *Veterans Reserve Corps*, the sergeants entrusted in 1865 with the care of the President's body. A replica hearse, stately, elegant, magnificent in every respect and detail, waited on the street to accept the coffin.

Led by military contingents and the President's Own Band, the funeral procession moved in a solemn manner along the streets of Lincoln's home town. Coffin project members Tim Tomlinson (HEF) and George Provenzano (HEF) had the honor of carrying the silk floral arrangement that would be placed atop the coffin as it "lay in state." When the long and colorful procession arrived at a point near the Old State Capitol where Lincoln had served in the Hall of Representatives, and near the current Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, the coffin was removed from the hearse and placed on a waiting catafalque.

Throughout the afternoon and early evening and again the next morning, thousands of people came by to view the Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin and the nearby hearse.



On Sunday, at noon, the procession formed again to begin the long, slow, and solemn walk from the Old State Capitol to Oak Ridge Cemetery. There, with appropriate respect and ceremony, the coffin was placed in the Old Burial Vault—Mr. Lincoln was finally home.

There is, of course, a story behind this wonderful new historical artifact. The first modern Lincoln look-alike coffin was built in 1984 by the Batesville Casket Company of Batesville, Indiana to specifications provided by the Illinois Funeral Directors Association. There are seven Batesville Lincoln coffins in use—two in a museum in Carthage, Illinois, one in a museum in Houston, Texas, and

four circulated by the Batesville company, on loan to museums and funeral homes around the country. A coffin was built in 2005 by a Florida exhibit company for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield, largely from the design features and specifications of the Batesville Lincoln coffin.

The Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin joins these two earlier models as coffin replicas. We intend to publish a book that describes and documents our experience. The publication date will be late 2016.

Who are the doers? How did we do what we did? Tim Tomlinson is the Chair of the Coffin Project, with Rose Tomlinson (CHS), Victoria Young (CHS), George Provenzano (HEF), Sandy Stack (HEF) and Mary Lillesve

(GHS). Mosby Woodwork of nearby Grafton, Illinois was contracted to build the box. Richard Mosby worked with the committee on the research needed to determine the dimensions of the coffin. Jim Fehlig of Fehlig Brothers Lumber Company donated the walnut

and poplar to build the coffin frame. Our friends at Federal Steel in East Alton, Illinois, Mark and Terri Darr and Nathan Rodgers, met with us on several occasions to discuss the coffin dimensions. They provided computer based schematics again and again as our research suggested necessary changes.

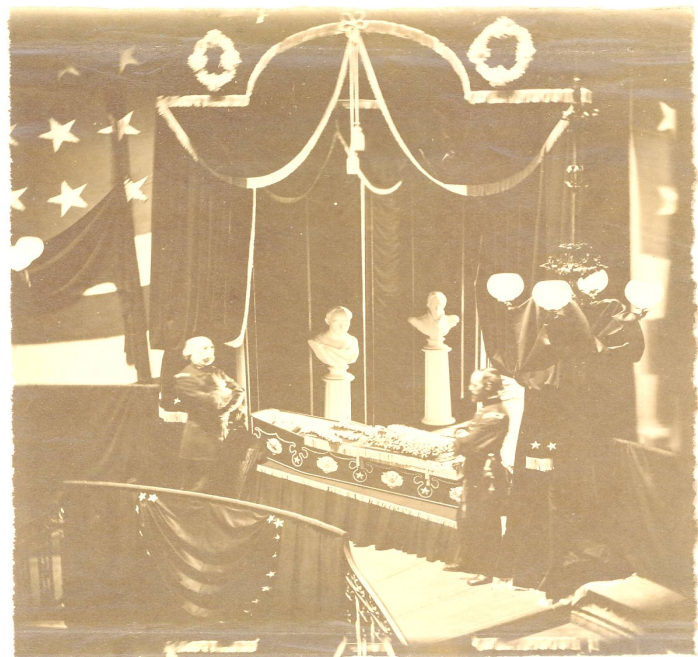


Richard Mosby



The starting point for our coffin research was a photograph available from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, often known as the New York City Hall photograph or the Gurney photograph. A story in itself, it is the only photograph known to exist of Abraham Lincoln in an open coffin. Jeremiah Gurney took the photograph on April 25, 1865 while the body was on view at New York City Hall. When Secretary of War Edwin Stanton learned of the photograph he ordered all plates destroyed, but he kept a copy for himself. Some years later Stanton's son turned that copy over to the Illinois State Historical Library where it was filed and promptly disappeared in the archives. It was "discovered" in 1951 by a 14 year old Iowa boy who was doing research on Lincoln. Sometimes history is stranger than fiction.

Our committee studied the Gurney photograph carefully. We looked at computer enhanced versions of the photograph as well as computer enhanced sections of the photograph. A major issue for us was the width of the coffin at the shoulder level. Our schematics and document research suggested a very narrow 18 inches. We had serious reservations about that information.





We purchased digital files from the National Archives documenting Lincoln's funeral expenses. These files verified the coffin was constructed of walnut but didn't help with determining its dimensions.

We consulted a number of sculptors including Jerry McCreary who created the Lincoln and Douglas figures in Lincoln-Douglas square in Alton, Illinois. We talked with McCreary by phone in his Texas studio while he measured a clay model of his Alton figures for us. McCreary thought our shoulder span dimension was possible; his fully dressed Lincoln figure had a shoulder span of 19 inches.

We consulted with Brooks Brothers' corporate historian in New York City, Kelly Stuart. She told us the clothier company had tailor measurements for a great coat the company gifted to Lincoln in 1865, the coat he wore to Ford's Theater the night he was assassinated. Brooks Brothers loaned us a replica of the coat along with other Lincoln tailor measurements to help us decide the coffin width at the shoulder break. Committee member Sandy Stack, retired from the Theater Arts Department at Principia



College, and other committee members determined that the measurements of the Lincoln coat supported our hypothesis about the shoulder width dimensions for the Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin.

James Cornelius, Lincoln Curator at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library sent us dimensions for the coffin on view at the Presidential Museum in Springfield. We visited the Presidential Museum to see that coffin for ourselves, and went to Carthage, Illinois to examine the 1984 look-alike coffin built by the Batesville staff.

Tim Tomlinson traveled to Batesville, Indiana in June 2014 where he found the two people who had built the first Batesville coffin thirty years earlier. Ilija Rojdev, now a high ranking administrator in the company, and Don Maple, now a special consultant to the company, were new partners as we came to final decisions about dimensions and overall look. Mosby Woodwork had completed the construction of the coffin, made true to our dimensions supported by computer schematics and old fashioned research. The next steps, the final steps, were up to Batesville. Travis



Drew of the Batesville Design staff provided CAD drawings of the decorative pattern that would conform to the dimensions of our Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin. The Batesville team fabricated new

decorative medallions and handles made of pewter and silver-plated in the Batesville factory, covered the box with the black wool broadcloth donated by Brooks Brothers, trimmed out the coffin interior, applied the decorative silver-plated hardware, and finished off the coffin with fringe and tassels. A silver-plated shield was added to the top lid of the coffin, a feature visible in 1865 drawings of the original coffin.

The Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin is now the official replica coffin of the 2015 Lincoln Funeral Reenactment Ceremonies held in Springfield Illinois, May 2-3, 2015. It is a museum quality piece, defined by extensive documentation and superior workmanship. It played a significant role in the story of *Bringing Mr. Lincoln Home*. It has gained an important place in Lincoln and Illinois history and is well-deserving of its new found prominence.



Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin under construction, Design Shop, Batesville Casket Company, Batesville, Indiana

You can see this wonderful artifact this coming fall. For HEF members, supporters, and friends of Lincoln, Elsah, and just good history, the Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin will be on display at a HEF fundraising dinner at Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Illinois on October 16, 2015. Invitations to the event will be sent out soon. Michael Burlingame, considered by many to be the nation's foremost Lincoln scholar, will be the featured speaker at the dinner event. The next day, October 17, the coffin will be the centerpiece for Lincoln commemorative activities in Lincoln-Douglas Square in Alton, Illinois, free and open to the public.

Our three local historical societies are understandably proud of our partnership and what we have accomplished as partners. We recognize there is still a major decision to be made. Where will the Great Rivers Lincoln Coffin go finally? We hope to make a recommendation soon on its final home. We promise to keep you posted.